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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

/058 W
---------- 083096
R 211100Z OCT 75
FM AMCONSUL LAHORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0616
INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMCONSUL KARACHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L LAHORE 1215

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PK
SUBJECT: KHAR BIDS TO CONTEST ANOTHER BY-ELECTION
PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY

REF: A) LAHORE 1212
B) LAHORE 1206

1. SUMMARY: EX-GOVERNOR KHAR ANNOUNCED IN PRESS CONFERENCE OCTOBER 20 HE WILL CONTEST ANOTHER BY-ELECTION FOR PUNJAB PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY SEAT REPORTEDLY TO BE VACATED SOON BY HIS CLOSE SUPPORTER MIAN IFTIKHAR AHMAD TARI, MPA. KHAR CLAIMED TARI AND TWO OTHER ASSOCIATES HAVE BEEN ABDUCTED BY GOVERNMENT BUT THAT MOVE WILL FAIL TO HALT TARI'S RESIGNATION. ASSERTING THAT HE HAD CREATED POLITICAL CRISIS FOR PRIMIN BHUTTO, KHAR TERMED HIS RECENT BY-ELECTION CAMPAIGNING "A BEGINNING OF THE MOVEMENT AGAINST GOVERNMENT" AND CALLED ON OTHER ELEMENTS OF OPPOSITION TO JOIN HIM. IN SECOND MEETING HELD SAME DAY AND PUBLICIZED IN VERNACULAR PRESS, KHAR AND HIS SUPPORTERS, INCLUDING FORMER CHIEF MINISTER RAMAY, DENOUNCED GOVERNMENT'S ALLEGED ELECTION MALPRACTICES AND CALLED FOR RELEASE OF DETAINEES. KHAR'S SECOND BID FOR PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY SEAT IS NOT UNEXPECTED. QUESTION NOW IS WHETHER GOVERNMENT WILL "ALLOW" TARI TO STEP
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DOWN. SOURCES CLOSE TO KHAR CLAIM CONFRONTATION WITH BHUTTO

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IS NEARING BREAK POINT, WITH POSSIBILITY OF KHAR'S OWN ARREST INCREASING. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE PPP STILL IN COMMAND; DEVELOPMENTS IN NEXT WEEK OR SO SHOULD INDICATE HOW GOVERNMENT INTENDS DEAL WITH KHAR, WHO PERSISTS IN HIS THREAT TO HARASS PPP IN PUNJAB. END SUMMARY.

2. FORMER GOVERNOR GHULAM MUSTAFA KHAR, DEFEATED BY PPP CANDIDATE IN PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY BY-ELECTION IN LAHORE OCTOBER 19, BOUNCED BACK WITH ANNOUNCEMENT AT PRESS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING DAY THAT HE WILL CONTEST ANOTHER PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY BY-ELECTION -- THIS TIME FOR LAHORE SEAT (CONSTITUENCY IV) ALLEGED TO BE VACATED SOON BY HIS CLOSE SUPPORTER MIAN IFTIKHAR AHMAD TARI. IN INDEPENDENT VERNACULAR NAWA-I-WAQT REPORT, KHAR ALLEGED THAT MIAN TARI AND TWO OTHER ASSOCIATES HAD BEEN ABDUCTED BY GOVERNMENT TO PREVENT TARI FROM RESIGNING SEAT. KHAR VOWED THIS MOVE WOULD FAIL, AS HE ALREADY HAD TARI'S RESIGNATION IN HAND AND WOULD FORWARD IT IMMEDIATELY TO SPEAKER OF ASSEMBLY. (SPEAKER TOLD PRESS OCTOBER 20 HE HAD NOT RECEIVED IT.)

3. IN COURSE OF PRESS CONFERENCE, WHICH WAS GIVEN SURPRISING COVERAGE IN ENGLISH AND VERNACULAR PRESS, KHAR ASSERTED THAT BY OFFERING HIMSELF AS CANDIDATE IN OCTOBER 19 BY-ELECTION, HE "HAD CREATED CRISIS WHICHIMAD TAKEN AWAY ALL INITIATIVE FROM PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO'S HANDS." HE TERMED HIS CANDIDACY "BEGINNING OF THE MOVEMENT AGAINST GOVERNMENT," AND SAID HE WOULD CALL ON ALL OPPOSITION ELEMENTS TO UNITE ON "SOME MINIMAL PROGRAM." (HE DID NOT, HOWEVER, SAY HE WOULD TAKE INITIATIVE IN CONTACTING TIP LEADER ASGHAR KHAN.) IF OPPOSITION REFUSES TO JOIN HIM, KHAR SAID, HE WOULD TAKE HIS CASE TO PEOPLE.

4. KHAR DEVOTED REMAINDER OF CONFERENCE TO DETAILING AGAIN ALLEGED GOVERNMENT MALPRACTICES IN OCTOBER 19 POLL (LAHORE 1212). HE COMPLAINED A NUMBER OF HIS ASSOCIATES AND WORKERS HAD BEEN ARRESTED, AND ADDED THAT IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO THEM, "RESULTS WILL BE SO GRIM AS CAN NOT EVEN BE IMAGINED BY MR. BHUTTO." HE ASSERTED THAT THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR RIGGING ELECTIONS WOULD BRING MARTIAL LAW BACK TO PAKISTAN.

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5. NAWA-I-WAQT REPORTED THAT KHAR HELD SECOND MEETING OCTOBER 20 ATTENDED BY VARIOUS DISAFFECTED MNAS AND MPAS, NOW ALL IN KHAR'S CAMP. GATHERING REPORTEDLY REVIEWED ALLEGED GOVERNMENT ELECTION MALPRACTICES AND CALLED FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF TARI AND OTHERS UNDER DETENTION. FORMER CHIEF MINISTER HANIF RAMAY PARTICIPATED AND IS SAID TO BE HOLDING JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE WITH KHAR OCTOBER 21.

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6. COMMENT: KHAR'S SECOND BID FOR PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY SEAT COMES AS NO SURPRISE. HE HAD BOASTED OF THIS INTENDED STRATEGY DURING FIRST BY-ELECTION. TARI, FORMER MINISTER IN KHAR'S PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, IS OLD KHAR CRONY WHO WILL NO DOUBT STEP ASIDE WILLINGLY -- THO PPP NY L# "PERSUADE"

HIM OTHERWISE -- TO PAVE WAY FOR BY-ELECTION, WHICH GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO HOLD WITHIN SIXTY DAYS OF RECEIPT OF HIS RESIGNATION BY SPEAKER OF ASSEMBLY. SOURCES CLOSE TO KHAR TELL US THIS SECOND BY-ELECTION BID WILL PRECIPITATE EVEN STRONGER CONFRONTATION WITH GOVERNMENT. POSSIBILITY THAT KHAR MAY BE ARRESTED, THEY ALSO SAY, GROWS DAILY. SOME BELIEVE BHUTTO WILL NOT TOLERATE A SECOND BY-ELECTION, AND WILL ADOPT WHATEVER MEANS NECESSARY TO STIFLE KHAR MOVEMENT NOW. PPP CONTACTS WE HAVE TAPPED REFUSE TO COMMENT ON ISSUE.

7. OUR OWN READING IS THAT PPP REMAINS ON TOP IN PUNJAB, BUT KHAR, IF HE KEEPS HIS FREEDOM, WILL PERSIST IN HIS THREAT TO HARASS PPP IN STRING OF BY-ELECTIONS, POSSIBLY GATHERING FURTHER OPPOSITION SUPPORT IN PROCESS. DEVELOPMENTS IN NEXT WEEK OR SO SHOULD REVEAL HOW PPP INTENDS TO COPE WITH KHAR'S LATEST CHALLENGE.
SPENGLER

NOTE BY OC/T: #AS RECEIVED.

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